

MAYTIME IN MARLOW

A Story by Booth Tarkington—Lu Allen Gained a Reputation for Brain Work by Going Out of Town When Maud and Bill Were a Little Upset on Account of Moving to a New Place

UPON the third Saturday of last May one idea possessed the minds and governed the actions of all the better bachelors of Marlow and all the widows, better and worse.

She was the first seen on the main street side of the square at about 9 o'clock in the morning. Mr. Rolf Williams, whose hardware establishment occupies a corner, caught a glimpse of her through a window. His clerk was only a little ahead of him in reaching the sidewalk.

"My goodness, George," Mr. Williams murmured, "who is that?"

"Couldn't be from a bit more'n half a mile this side of New York," said George, marveling. "Look at the clothes!"

The lady was but thirty or forty feet away, and the murmur of the two voices attracted her attention. Not pausing in her light stride forward, she looked back over her shoulder, and her remarkable eyes twinkled with recognition. She nodded twice—first, unmistakably to Mr. Williams, and then, with equal distinctness, to George.

These dumfounded men were no more flustered than was old Mr. Newton Truscum (clothesier, hatter and gaiter-furnisher), just emerging from his place of business next door; for Mr. Truscum was likewise sunnily greeted.

"My goodness," Mr. Williams gasped. "I never saw her from Adam."

"Look!" said Mr. Truscum. "She's goin' in Milo Carter's drug store. Sody-water, I shouldn't wonder!"

HALF an hour later, Mortimer Fole was busy drifting about the square exchanging comment with other shirt-sleeved gossipers.

He dropped into E. J. Fuller's (E. J. Fuller & Co., furniture, carpets and wall-paper).

"Listen here, Ed," said Mortimer, "what'd she do when she went into Charlie Murdock's and bought a paper of pins? She went in there and spoke right to Charlie. 'How are you, Mr. Murdock?' she says. Charlie like to fell over backwards! And then, when he got the pins wrapped up, she says, 'How's your wife, Mr. Murdock?'"

"Where's she supposed to be now?" Mr. Fuller inquired, not referring to Mrs. Murdock. "Over at the hotel."

"Nope," Mortimer replied. "Right now she's went upstairs in the Garfield block to Lu Allen's office."

Mr. Fuller at once came out from behind his counter.

"Where goin', Ed?" Mortimer inquired.

"Och!" Mr. Fuller replied.

"I'll go with you," said the sociable Mortimer. "Where'd you say you was goin', Ed?"

"Business!" Mr. Fuller replied crossly.

"Suits me, Ed. I kind of want to see Lu Allen, myself!"

Thereupon they set forth across the square, but when they obtained a fair view of the Garfield block, they paused. She of their quest was disappearing into the warm obscurity of Pawpaw street, and beside her sauntered Mr. Lucius Brutus Allen, attorney-at-law. In the deep, contented shade of the maple trees her parasol was unnecessary, and Lucius dangled it from his hand.

Mr. Williams stood upon the corner with his wife, and P. Borodino Thompson. "That's Lu Allen's lady-walk," said Rolf, as E. J. Fuller and Mortimer joined them. "He always kind of sags when he goes out walkin' with the girls. Sags too toward 'em. Looks to me like he's just about fixin' to lean on her!"

"Don't you worry!" his wife said testily. "Lucy'd slap him in a minute. She always was that kind of a girl."

"Lucy!" Mortimer echoed. "Lucy who?"

"Lucy Cope."

"What on earth are you talkin' about, Miz Williams? That ain't Lucy Cope!" Mrs. Williams laughed. "Just what ain't?" she asked sarcastically. "I expect some of the men in this town better go get the eye-doctor to take a look at 'em! Especially—she gave her husband a compassionate glance—"especially the fat old ones! Mr. Cal Burns come past my house 'while ago; says, 'Mr. Williams, Lucy Cope Ricketts is back in town,' she says, 'and none the men recognized her yet,' she says, 'and you better go on up to the square and take a look for yourself how they're behavein'!"

"Well, sir," Mr. Williams declared, "I couldn't hardly believe it, but it certainly is her."

MR. FULLER intervened in search of information. He was not a native, and had been a citizen of Marlow a little less than four years. "Did you say this lady was one of the Ricketts family, Mrs. Williams?" he inquired.

"No, she married a Ricketts. She's a Cope; she's all there is left of the Copes. Her and Tom Ricketts got married ten years ago and went to live in California. He's been dead three-four years maybe and she's come back to live in the Copes' old house. Everybody knows she's comin' some time this spring. If you want to know why the men never took any interest up to this morning in Lucy Cope Ricketts' goin' to come back and live here again, it's because all they ever remembered her was kind of a peckish girl; sort of thin, and never seemed to have much complexion to speak of."

"How's it happen Lu Allen's so thick with Mrs. Ricketts?" E. J. Fuller inquired. "How's it come that he—"

"He's her lawyer," Mrs. Williams informed him, "and he was executor of the Cope will, and all. Besides that, he used to be awful attentive to her, and nobody was hardly certain which she was goin' to take, Lu Allen or Tom Ricketts, right up to a year or two before she got married. Looks like Lu was goin' to get a second chance, and money to boot."

"Well, Lu's a talker, but he'll have to talk some now!" P. Borodino Thompson announced thoughtfully. "I used to know her, too, but I never ex-

pected she was going to turn out like this!"

Meanwhile, in the sun-checked shadow of a honeysuckle vine beside an old doorway, Mr. Lucius Brutus Allen was taking leave of his lovely friend.

"Will you come this evening, Lucius, and help me decide on some remodeling for the house?" she asked.

"No, thanks," said Mr. Allen. "I never could decide which I thought your voice was like, Lucy; a harp or a violin. Doesn't make any difference what you say, whenever you speak a person can't help thinking of wild roses shaking the dew off of 'em in the breeze, that blow along at sunrise."

Mrs. Ricketts looked at him steadily. "When will you come and help me with the plans, she asked."

"I don't know," Mr. Allen returned absently; and he added with immediate enthusiasm: "I never in my life saw any girl whose hair made such a lovely shape to her head as yours, Lucy! It's the one thing in the world without any fault at all—the only thing just perfect—except your nose and maybe the Parthenon when it was new."

That brought a laugh from her, and Lucius grew rosy. "By George," he said, "to hear you laugh again!"

"You always did make me laugh, Lucius."

"Especially if I had anything the matter with me," he said. "If I had a headache or tooth ache I'd always come around to get you to laugh. Sometimes if the pain was pretty bad it wouldn't go away till you laughed two or three times!"

She laughed the more; then she sighed. "Over ten years, almost eleven—and you saying things like this to every girl and woman you met, all the time!"

"Well," Mr. Allen said, thoughtfully, "nobody takes much notice what a chunky kind of man with a reddish head and getting a little bald says. It's quite a privilege."

SHE laughed again, and sighed again. "Do you remember how we used to sit out here in the evenings under the trees, Lucius? One of the things I've often thought about since then was how, when you were here, papa and mamma would bring their chairs and join us, and you'd talk about the moon, and astronomy and the hundred years' war, and—"

"Yes," Lucius interrupted ruefully. "And then some other young fellow would turn up—some slim, dark-haired Orlando—and I'd be talking astronomy with the old folks, but you and Orlando were strolling under the stars—and didn't care what they were made of."

"No," she said. "I mean what I've thought about is that papa and mamma never joined us unless you were here. It took me a long while to understand that, Lucius; but finally I did. Do the girls and boys still sit out in the yards in the evenings, Lucius?"

"No," he answered. "These ten years have changed the world. Lucy. Money and gasoline. Bore Thompson's about the only man in town that's still got any use for a hitching post. By tomorrow afternoon at the latest, you'll find his hitching post and the old folks tied to the ring in the hand of that little old cast-iron nigger boy in front of your gate yonder."

"No," she said. "I don't know of much," said Mrs. Ricketts glanced at the decoration he mentioned; then she smiled. "That's one of the things I want you to advise me about," she said. "I don't know how much of the place to alter and how much to leave as it is. And how much will I and Mr. Thompson's horse tied to our poor old cast-iron darky boy?"

"He's seen you, hasn't he?"

"Yes, but he looked startled when I spoke to him. Besides, when I was a girl, he was one of the best of the town, and he never came then."

"He'll grow," she protested. "A little now."

"He couldn't help it if he tried, poor thing!"

"You seem to be able to help it, Lucius," she said. "Of course you do; know that the way you declined to come this evening is one of the things that make life seem such a curious and mixed-up thing to me. After I—when I'd gone away from here to live, you were what I always remembered when I thought of Marlow, Lucius. And I remembered things you'd said to me that I hadn't thought of at all when you were saying them. It was so strange! I've got to know you better and better all the long, long time I've been away from you. It seems queer and almost a little wicked to say it, but I could remember you more clearly than I could papa and mamma—and, oh! how I've looked forward to seeing you again and to having you talk to me about everything! Why won't you come this evening? Aren't you really glad I'm home again?"

"That's the trouble!" he said. "What in the world do you mean?"

"I gather," he said, slowly, "from what you've said, that you think more about me when I'm not around where you have to look at me! Besides—"

"Besides what?" she insisted, as he moved toward the gate.

"I'm afraid!" said Lucius; and his voice was husky and honest. "I'm afraid," he repeated seriously. "I'm afraid to meet Maud and Bill."

She uttered half a word of protest, and it went unheard. Prowling, she stood watching his departure. Then, all at once, she pressed an insignificant handkerchief to a charming mouth overtaken by sudden laughter. But she made no sound or gesture that would check Lucius Brutus Allen or rouse him to the realization of what he was doing.

The sturdy gentleman was marching up Pawpaw street, unconscious that he had forgotten to return the long-handled blue parasol to its owner—and that he was now jauntily carrying it over his right shoulder. Mrs. Ricketts spoke half aloud:

"Nobody—not one—never anywhere," she said; and she meant that Lucius was unparalleled.

When Mr. Allen debouched upon

Main street from Pawpaw, he encountered Mortimer Fole.

"Takin' it to get mended, I suppose, Lu?"

"Get what mended?" asked Lucius, pausing.

"Her parasol," Mr. Fole responded. "You'll show me where it's out of order, I expect. I could get it fixed up about as well as anybody. I'd be willin' to carry it up to her house for

treme damage of his white blouse, a large can of red paint, while Maud was swinging a paint brush that had been reposing in the can.

Maud applied the brush to the side of the house, but Bill indignantly snatched the brush from her hand.

"Shame!" he said. "You know what you got once!"

"When?" Maud demanded. "When did I get it?"

light, too; so that we can both see how little we've changed. The children were the reason I was so long; they were washed and dressed like little clean angels, but they're in rather high spirits—you know how children are for the first few days after coming to a new place—and they slipped down into the cellar and found an old air passage to the furnace, and crawled through it, and so

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Mortimer removed his hat. "Heard about Henry Ledyard yet?" he inquired.

"No."

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"What did they do?"

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"Oh, only breaking a straw hat," said Lucius. "I don't see how that's—"

"The two of 'em come up-town," Mortimer interrupted firmly. "They come up-town and they went into E. J. Fuller's store and Ed says they come mighty near drivin' him crazy, walkin' up and down blind him singin' 'Grammammy Tipstoe.' Then they went on over to Milo Carter's, and they had a dollar and forty cents with 'em that they'd went and got out of their little bank. They set seven big ice-cream sodas a-piece and got sick right in the store. And that ain't half of it!"

"What's the other half?" Lucius asked gravely.

"Well, you heard about Bore, of course."

"No, I haven't."

MORTIMER rubbed his head. "I reckon that might be so," he admitted. "I guess you must of left town by the time it leaked out."

"By the time what leaked out?"

"Well, you remember how he started off, that day," Mortimer began, "to get her to go out buggy-ridin' in his phaeton with ole General?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, he turned up at the hardware store about two hours later, and says she wasn't feelin' too well, and so they just set around and talked, instead of ridin'. But Bore never went back there, and ain't goin' to, you bet, any more than what Henry Ledyard is! There ain't hardly no man in Marlow but what Maud and Bill's got buffaloed, Lu!"

Mr. Allen occupied himself with the sharpening of a pencil. "What did they do to Thompson?" he asked casually.

"Well, sir, after he went up there and wasn't no sign of him on the Square for awhile, I walked around there the back way by Copes' alley, and just as I was turnin' in on the alley, by Glory! here come P. Borodino Thompson leadin' ole General and the phaeton in at the other end, and walkin' as fur away from him as he could and yet still lead him."

"Well, sir, pore ole General—honest, he looked more like a slaughter-house than he did like a horse, Lu! 'What is the matter, Bore?' I says, and you never hear a man take on the way he done."

"Seems Maud and Bill had painted ole General red while Bore was in the house fixin' to take her mother out on this here buggy-ride. And well, sir, to hear him take on, you'd of thought I was responsible for the whole business! Says it might as well be all over town, now he'd ran into me! But I kind of soothed him down, and last I fixed it up with him to give me credit for a little insurance my wife's been wantin' to take out on her stopmother, if I'd put General and the phaeton in George Copes' empty barn, there in the alley, until after dark, and not say nothin' to George or anybody about it, and then drive him over to Bore's and unhitch him and wash him off with turpentine that night."

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"I hope they didn't annoy you, Mr. Thompson; I thought I heard them romping down here, somewhere. They're really not so wild as they must seem; it's only that coming to a place altogether strange to them has upset them a little, and—There!"

The catch yielded, and she spread the shutters wide. "Now we can have a little more light!"

She paused in the middle of the word, gazing fixedly out of the window.

But the caller was looking at her with concentrated approval. "I have called," he said, "or, rather, I have stopped by on my way to take a drive, because I thought it might be cooler than sitting indoors to take a turn around the square first and then drive out toward the Athens City pike and return by way of—"

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"March!" said his mother in the tone that meant the worst. "Round to the kitchen—not through the house! Both of you! Quick!"

Round the corner of the house went the dread pageant, and the green grass looked like murder where it passed. But when Mrs. Ricketts returned, after delivering Maud and Bill into the hands of a despairing servitor, General and the phaeton were gone.

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And Maud obeyed her mother jumped out of the window. Bill in-

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"March!" said his mother in the tone that meant the worst. "Round to the kitchen—not through the house! Both of you! Quick!"

Round the corner of the house went the dread pageant, and the green grass looked like murder where it passed. But when Mrs. Ricketts returned, after delivering Maud and Bill into the hands of a despairing servitor, General and the phaeton were gone.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she murmured, and went drooping into the house. In her mind's eye she saw Mr. Thompson in all his special dressiness and lemon yellow tie, driving through the streets and explaining to people: "Yes, Lucy Ricketts has come back, and her children did this!" She remembered what Lucius had said: "I'm afraid to meet Maud and Bill!"

She began to feel strickenly sure that Lucius would return her parasol by a messenger. If he did that (she thought) what was the use of com-

ing all the way from California to live in a town like Marlow!

But the parasol was not sent, nor did Lucius bring it. It remained, as did Mr. Allen himself, obscured from her sight and from her knowledge.

Mortimer dropped into Mr. Allen's office and expressed surprise at finding the tenant in town. "I been up here two and three times a day for a

week, Lu," he said, seating himself. "Where on earth you been?"

"Argument before the federal court in Springfield," Lucius answered. "What did you want to see me about, Mortimer?"

Mortimer removed his hat. "Heard about Henry Ledyard yet?" he inquired.

"No."

"All, sir, he went up there," said Mortimer. "He only went once!"

"What was the trouble?"

Mr. Fole cast his eyes high aloft. "Maud and Bill," he said.

"What did they do?"

"Henry was settin' in the parlor talkin' to their mother, and the way I heard it, all of a sudden they heard some'n go 'Pop!' outside in the hall and when they came to look it was that new, stiff, high-crowned straw hat he went and ordered from New York and had shipped out here by express. Then two children have just about got this town buffaloed, Lu!"

"Oh, only breaking a straw hat," said Lucius. "I don't see how that's—"

"The two of 'em come up-town," Mortimer interrupted firmly. "They come up-town and they went into E. J. Fuller's store and Ed says they come mighty near drivin' him crazy, walkin' up and down blind him singin' 'Grammammy Tipstoe.' Then they went on over to Milo Carter's, and they had a dollar and forty cents with 'em that they'd went and got out of their little bank. They set seven big ice-cream sodas a-piece and got sick right in the store. And that ain't half of it!"

"What's the other half?" Lucius asked gravely.

"Well, you heard about Bore, of course."

"No, I haven't."

MORTIMER rubbed his head. "I reckon that might be so," he admitted. "I guess you must of left town by the time it leaked out."

"By the time what leaked out?"

"Well, you remember how he started off, that day," Mortimer began, "to get her to go out buggy-ridin' in his phaeton with ole General?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, he turned up at the hardware store about two hours later, and says she wasn't feelin' too well, and so they just set around and talked, instead of ridin'. But Bore never went back there, and ain't goin' to, you bet, any more than what Henry Ledyard is! There ain't hardly no man in Marlow but what Maud and Bill's got buffaloed, Lu!"

Mr. Allen occupied himself with the sharpening of a pencil. "What did they do to Thompson?" he asked casually.

"Well, sir, after he went up there and wasn't no sign of him on the Square for awhile, I walked around there the back way by Copes' alley, and just as I was turnin' in on the alley, by Glory! here come P. Borodino Thompson leadin' ole General and the phaeton in at the other end, and walkin' as fur away from him as he could and yet still lead him."

"Well, sir, pore ole General—honest, he looked more like a slaughter-house than he did like a horse, Lu! 'What is the matter, Bore?' I says, and you never hear a man take on the way he done."

"Seems Maud and Bill had painted ole General red while Bore was in the house fixin' to take her mother out on this here buggy-ride. And well, sir, to hear him take on, you'd of thought I was responsible for the whole business! Says it might as well be all over town, now he'd ran into me! But I kind of soothed him down, and last I fixed it up with him to give me credit for a little insurance my wife's been wantin' to take out on her stopmother, if I'd put General and the phaeton in George Copes' empty barn, there in the alley, until after dark, and not say nothin' to George or anybody about it, and then drive him over to Bore's and unhitch him and wash him off with turpentine that night."

"Well, sir, if I've told Bore Thompson once I've told him a hundred times, what's the use his actin' the fool about it! 'What earthly good's it goin' to do,' I says, 'to go around mad,' I says, 'and abusin' the very ones,' I says, 'that done the most to help you out? The boys are bound to have their joke,' I says to him, 'and if it hadn't been you, why, like as not they might of been ridin' some'n on Lu Allen or Cal Burns, or

you had to be all washed and dressed over again, and when I got through doing it I had to be all washed and dressed over again!"

"I hope they didn't annoy you, Mr. Thompson; I thought I heard them romping down here, somewhere. They're really not so wild as they must seem; it's only that coming to a place altogether strange to them has upset them a little, and—There!"

The catch yielded, and she spread the shutters wide. "Now we can have a little more light!"

She paused in the middle of the word, gazing fixedly out of the window.

But the caller was looking at her with concentrated approval. "I have called," he said, "or, rather, I have stopped by on my way to take a drive, because I thought it might be cooler than sitting indoors to take a turn around the square first and then drive out toward the Athens City pike and return by way of—"

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Ricketts in a tone so remarkable that he stopped short; and then his eyes followed in the direction of her head.

He uttered a stricken cry.

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